

By Robert Kelly and Jake Wagman, St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Rep. Russ Carnahan was in town Monday, stressing the need for bipartisan support for the economic stimulus package working its way through Congress.

Sen. Christopher "Kit" Bond also stopped in — on his way to Washington to vote against the bill.

Support for the \$800 billion package among bistate area senators continued to follow party lines later in the day. Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., joined Democratic Sens. Dick Durbin and Roland Burris of Illinois in voting to advance the recovery package. McCaskill noted that she had been working behind the scenes with a cadre of Senate moderates to shape legislation that could pass.

"It may not be perfect, but we cut some of the spending and produced a bill that will create jobs and cut taxes for working families," she said.

But Bond, speaking at Lambert-St. Louis International Airport, continued his opposition to the stimulus bill.

"It stimulates the debt, it stimulates government, but it doesn't stimulate the growth of jobs," Bond said. "It doesn't provide the basic need we have in this country — to deal with the problems in the home industry and the credit market."

Bond, like other Republicans, has criticized the bill for spending measures that he says won't jump-start the economy nor put people back to work.

Earlier, he railed against a provision — since stripped from the bill — that would have provided tax breaks to Hollywood film projects.

"There should not be a rush to pass something that's bad," Bond said. "A trillion dollars is a terrible thing to waste. "

Carnahan, meanwhile, addressed residents of his 3rd Congressional District in his annual "state of the district" speech. He told an overflow crowd of more than 150 people in the Festus City Council chambers that Congress must act quickly to prevent a further slide in economic conditions.

He said that to do little or nothing would plunge the nation into a deeper recession or even a depression.

The Senate is expected to pass an \$827 billion stimulus bill today. But that measure must be

reconciled with the House's \$819 billion version that passed earlier. President Barack Obama has been urging Congress to have a stimulus bill on his desk for signing by the middle of February.

"Now more than ever is the time for us to stick together," Carnahan said. "It took us years to dig this economic hole that our country is in, and it's going to take us time to dig out. But there isn't time to waste."

In questions after the speech, several of those attending expressed doubt that the stimulus money would get to the right places and be used correctly to spur development and create more jobs.

Carnahan responded that the measure would "be much stricter and much smarter" than a bank bailout bill last fall that many believed was misused and failed to prevent a deeper slide into recession. He said federal regulators would be authorized to account for how the money is used and to alert Congress of abuses.

Bill Lambrecht of the Post-Dispatch contributed to this report.

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